THEN AND NOW

OR

A COMPARISON BETWEEN THE WAR WITH NAPOLEON AND THE PRESENT WAR

BEING THE CREIGHTON LECTURE FOR 1917, DELIVERED AT KING'S COLLEGE, LONDON, ON OCTOBER 17TH

BY

C. H. FIRTH, M.A.

REGIUS PROFESSOR OF MODERN HISTORY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

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THEN AND NOW

When I was invited to lecture to you, I thought of many subjects, but I found I could only choose this. Continually, during the last three years, the resemblance between the position of Great Britain at the opening of the nineteenth century, and its position now, has been in my mind. Some event abroad, some incident at home, something in a speech or a newspaper, was always reminding me of the days when England had to exert all her strength and all her endurance in the struggle against nobler foes under a great leader. What this meant we understand now better than we did four years ago. There are many differences as well as many resemblances between the two struggles, but under all changes of time and circumstances the character of a people remains the same: we can learn some lessons from their experience; we can draw comfort for the present from the past.

I must begin by reminding you of a few familiar facts. In 1802 England, after nine years of war, had attained a precarious peace. In May, 1803, after fourteen months of peace, war broke out again. We were in a far better position then than we were in 1793, when the war with the French Revolution began. In 1793 we had a regular army of about 50,000 men, with about 30,000 militia behind it; we had about 75 ships of the line fit for sea and 25,000 sailors to man them. In May, 1803, we had a regular army of 114,000 men, backed by about 50,000 militia; we had about 85 ships

of the line and 200 smaller ships fit for service, and 50,000 sailors in pay. In short, we were better prepared for defence or attack than we had been at the beginning of any previous war. But there was one great difference between 1793 and 1803. In 1793 three of the four great continental powers, Austria, Prussia, and Spain were fighting on our side; in 1803 all four were neutral, so that we had no allies. On the other hand, the navy of France had been so ruined during the first war, that in the second we had the control of the sea from the very beginning. Six months after the war began all the ports of France could not muster more than 21 ships of the line and 19 frigates fit for sea. Napoleon had miscalculated; he had counted on post-poning the war till he was ready to strike, and our prompt answer to his threats secured us an initial advantage. Until Spain, at the end of 1804, joined the side of France, it was impossible for Napoleon to get together a fleet strong enough to dispute the command of the Channel.

Invasion therefore was not in 1803 or 1804 a very real danger. Experienced naval officers laughed at Napoleon's flat-bottomed boats. It is true that there was considerable alarm amongst some people; especially if they lived near the coast. "These times," said Wordsworth, "strike moneyed worldlings with dismay,

> Even rich men, brave by nature, taint the air
> With words of apprehension and despair."

Common people, with better nerves and less to lose, were not perturbed but defiant; they greedily bought caricatures which represented John Bull standing knee deep in the sea outside Boulogne, shaking his fist at the flotilla and crying, "Why don't you come out." Still

more popular were the series which represented a rustic with Napoleon's head on a pitchfork, or a soldier with Napoleon's head on a bayonet, or George III., as a British huntsman, giving the Corsican fox to his hounds, or Beelzebub going to supper with Napoleon on a toasting fork.

The real danger of invasion came in 1805. Napoleon's plan was to lure the British fleet to the West Indies in order to secure, in its absence, the control of the Channel and the safe passage of the army at Boulogne. "Make me but master of the Channel for the space of three days," wrote Napoleon, "and with God's help I will put an end to the career and existence of England." That was written on the 26th of July, 1805; on the 21st of October Nelson ruined his plan, though he still cherished the dream.

On land the war went steadily against us. As soon as it began Napoleon occupied Hanover, but this did not much affect British opinion, which had always regarded the Electorate as a sort of millstone hung at the neck of England. We had no allies; of the four great continental powers three were neutral and the other one allied itself with France at the end of 1804. But Pitt was confident that sooner or later the aggressive policy of Napoleon would force other states to resist him. England would save herself by her own exertions and Europe by her example. Napoleon ordered Fouché to have caricatures made in Paris depicting John Bull with a purse in his hand bribing other nations to fight for him. But that was a misrepresentation of the facts. When they had made up their minds to fight foreign governments came to England begging for subsidies to set

their troops in motion. In 1805 the third coalition was formed. England made a treaty with Russia in April, to which Austria acceded in August, and it seemed likely that Prussia would join the league.

But Napoleon did not wait to be attacked. On the 20th of October he forced Mack to surrender at Ulm, on the 13th of November he occupied Vienna, on the 2nd of December he routed the Austrians and Russians at Austerlitz, and the third coalition was over. Europe's attempt to save herself had failed. "Roll up the map of Europe: it will not be needed these ten years," said the dying Pitt, and he was only two years out in his calculation.

The turn of Prussia came next; throughout the campaign of 1805 Prussia had behaved with a mixture of double-dealing and irresolution. On the 3rd of November, 1805, she signed a treaty with Russia, promising to join the coalition with 180,000 men. On the 15th of February, 1806, she signed an alliance with France, and obtained Hanover as the price of her support, and became in consequence involved in war with England. In August she was goaded into war with her new ally, by Napoleon's insults and aggressions, by his organisation of the Confederation of the Rhine, and by learning that he had offered to restore Hanover to England in the peace negotiations in progress. The result of the war was the overthrow of Prussia at the battle of Jena on the 14th of October, 1806. Russia came to the rescue, and her help prolonged the war nine months longer. After the drawn battle of Eylau (8th February, 1807) and the defeat of the Russians at Friedland (14th June, 1807),

the treaty of Tilsit was concluded (7th-9th July, 1807), which was based on an agreement between Alexander and Napoleon for the settlement of Europe and for the permanent exclusion of English trade from the continent.

Once more England was isolated: and our isolation lasted for nearly five whole years. This period, which lasted from the treaties of Tilsit in July, 1807, to the war between France and Russia in the summer of 1812, was the critical period of the struggle. Austria tried once more the fortune of war in 1809, fought for three months (April-July), but was reduced to impotence and subservience.

Spain and Portugal were our allies from 1808, but they were dependent on us for military and financial support. Our arms also maintained the rule of the Spanish Bourbons in Sicily. With these exceptions, all the continent was hostile to us, and closed to our trade. On the resources and on the tenacity of England depended our own freedom and all that was left of the independence of other nations.

What prospect of success was there when this phase of the unequal struggle began, and what was the temper of our people? Napoleon declared that his victory was certain. Forty-five millions of people, he once said, must prevail over sixteen millions, and he had since then forced many millions more to support his policy.

There were some Englishmen who thought the prolongation of the struggle impossible. Peter Plymley's Letters, ten in number, appeared in 1807 (some before, some after the treaties of Tilsit), and passed through sixteen editions in a year. In them Sydney Smith argued for the removal of Catholic disabilities, because

it was absurd to weaken England by keeping four million Irishmen enemies when they might be made friends. Incidentally he asserted that success in the war was impossible. Our allies were worthless, except those "ancient and unsubsidised allies of England," the winds. Our blockade of France was useless. Invasion was likely to come immediately, and sure to be successful. He denounced the optimism of the British nation: "We do not appear to me half alarmed enough." He condemned the continuation of the struggle. "The war is carried on without it being possible to conceive a single object which a rational being can propose to itself by its continuance." Above all, he denounced the government of Perceval and Canning.

Mr. Canning was "a wretched imitation of Pitt," and "a pert London joker"; Mr. Perceval "a second rate placeman with the head of a country parson and the tongue of an Old Bailey lawyer."[1]

It would be easy to multiply utterances of this kind from other sources. "In the course of a few years you may not have a country," wrote John Campbell to his brother in India. "Every part of the continent south of the Baltic is now Bonaparte's as fully as the department of the Seine, and all the energies of his vast empire will now be directed with rancorous skill against England, without a vigorous statesman or an experienced general." He was not seriously alarmed "for the ultimate independence of England," though he expected an invasion; but he was dismayed at the prospect that our forces would be led by the king and his sons.[2]

[1] Peter Plymley's Letters.

[2] Cf. Lord Campbell's Life, i. 187, 189, 194.

Some superior persons were not so much afraid of invasion as of the measures proposed to resist it: of what are now termed "militarism" and "conscription." "The sort of army," said Francis Horner, "and the means of raising it, that some people want, would only be a less evil than conquest by a foreign invader . . . after flattering ourselves with the vision of a splendid military power, we should awaken slaves in a camp."[1]

The spirit of England, like the City of Mansoul in Bunyan's allegory, was besieged by armies of Doubters —Doubters of every breed. Yet many had a quiet conviction that our people would be equal to the task it had to perform. "We are by nature a grumbling nation," wrote a lady, "but in times of exigency have always risen when exertion was really wanted."[2] And a few rose with Wordsworth to the height of confidence and resolution. "We are left alone," he wrote on the news of the overthrow of Prussia,

> "We are left, or shall be left, alone,
> The last that dare to struggle with the foe.
> 'Tis well! from this day forward we shall know
> That in ourselves our safety must be sought;
> That by our own right hands it must be wrought;
> That we must stand unpropped, or be laid low.
> O dastard whom such foretaste doth not cheer!
> We shall exult, if they who rule the land
> Be men who hold its many blessings dear,
> Wise, upright, valiant: not a servile band
> Who are to judge of danger, which they fear,
> And honour, which they do not understand."

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[1] Life of Francis Horner, i. 388.

[2] Private Correspondence of the first Earl Granville, ii. 260.

Is it not curious to observe that all these contemporary utterances agreed in one thing: the doubts they express arose from distrust of our rulers rather than fear of our enemy? Something must be attributed to the party feeling which is inseparable from the existence of party government. In those days war led to no party truce. General elections went on as usual. There had been one in August, 1802, just before the war began: there were three during the war. One in December, 1806, just after the battle of Jena; another in June, 1807, just at the time of the peace of Tilsit; the third in November, 1812, during Napoleon's retreat from Moscow. Yet, in spite of these frequent appeals to the country, no ministry seemed to obtain or to keep the full confidence of the country. Addington's ministry was one of the most long-lived; it came into office in March, 1801, made the peace in 1802, declared war again in 1803, and fell in 1804 because it was not considered capable of conducting war, and because, as Canning said, for the purpose of coping with Napoleon, one great commanding spirit was worth all its defensive measures. Pitt was recalled to power in May, 1804, but his death brought his administration to an end when it had lasted only twenty months. Its successor, the ministry of Fox and Grenville, lasted less than fifteen months. Portland's ministry, after existing for about two years and a half, was broken up by the death of its head and the quarrel of Castlereagh and Canning. Perceval's ministry lasted two years and nine months, and it was not till the formation of the Liverpool ministry in June, 1812, that a stable and lasting government came into being.

In seasons of great peril the resource of the ancients was a dictator; that of the moderns is a coalition ministry. Pitt tried twice to form one—in May, 1804, and September, 1805—but failed because George III. would not agree to the inclusion of Fox. Grenville expressed his conviction that "all the talents and exertions of all the public men of the country were not more than sufficient to meet the dangers that threatened it," but he and his friends refused to take office because Fox was excluded. Canning would not sit with Addington because he regarded him as incapable, or Addington with Canning because he had been satirised by him. Castlereagh and Canning could not act together after 1809 because Canning had intrigued against Castlereagh. Wellesley refused to join Liverpool's government in 1812 because Canning was excluded from it. Throughout no one was more captious and more difficult to deal with than Canning. "He takes as much courting as a woman," said the Prince Regent, "and a good deal more than most."[1]

Besides differences about men there were differences about measures—wide enough and deep enough to divide not merely the two great parties, but sections of one party from another. There was the question of Catholic Emancipation, which had overthrown Pitt in 1801, which had driven the Whigs from office in 1807, which had separated Tories such as Canning, Wellesley, and Castlereagh from Tories such as Perceval, Addington, and Eldon. There were a series of questions about the war; disputes about its origin, about the possibility of making peace with France, about the justice of the

[1] Granville, Private Correspondence, ii. 443.

Copenhagen expedition, and finally, about the possibility of carrying on the war in Spain. These differences of opinion weakened the opposition. Some of its old leaders thought that at such a crisis the government ought to be supported. Grenville said in 1807, "the ordinary struggle of an opposition campaign in Parliament neither becomes us, nor is what the public would endure. . . . I feel an extreme repugnance to these wordy wars at a moment when the country itself has not perhaps two years more of existence."[1] But this mood was not lasting nor general. Before many months the old game was resumed with old vigour, and the debates of the two Houses were filled with carping criticisms and pessimistic prophecies, which Napoleon regularly reprinted in the *Moniteur* for the comfort and encouragement of the enemy.

The spectacle of these dissensions and intrigues caused a strong revulsion of feeling in the nation, which reached its height about 1809. "I am fully aware," confessed a Whig leader, "of the apathy of the public, and of their indifference towards the proceedings of the House of Commons, and of their distrust of all public men." A back-bench Tory compared the statesmen of the day with those of the past. "By heavens! the contrast is too disgusting. I know as little of history, even of my own country, as any gentleman need do, but it is impossible not to pick up enough to see and admire to an excess the sense and spirit of the old patriots, and certainly we have proof enough of the present men to make one dead sick of the very thoughts of them." With more brevity a sailor, writing to a member of

[1] Buckingham, Court and Cabinets of George III. iv. 223, 288.

Parliament, summed up his view of politicians: "What a cursed set you all are." [1]

At the moment the popular panacea was a change in the system of parliamentary representation. But it was popular only outside the House of Commons: when Burdett in 1809 brought forward a motion in favour of parliamentary reform he could not muster more than fifteen votes. The political influence which Parliament lost went entirely to the newspapers, and this was not an advantage. The newspapers were useful as expressing opinions which the defects of the representative system prevented from finding utterance in Parliament, and their criticisms were sometimes a valuable check on the government. But they were an obstacle to the successful conduct of the war. Editors had not then a feeling of responsibility, and they were not controlled by any censorship, so they continually published military information of great value to the enemy. The Sunday papers are full of it. Wellington also complained that their dogmatic comments on military operations, by their alternate optimism and pessimism, perturbed the minds of the people with groundless hopes and needless fears.

The burdens of the war were heavy enough without these added anxieties.

There was the burden of service in the army and navy. Between 1803 and 1814 the number of men serving in the navy rose from 50,000 to about 112,000 men. The larger part of them were raised by compulsion, and the system of impressment was a very heavy tax on the sea-going population and the maritime

[1] Creevey Papers, i. 92, 95, 98.

countries. The ballads, the novels and the literature of the time in general supply ample evidence of its unpopularity.

The system of raising men for the army was so confused and changed so often that it is difficult to describe it. For this confusion the mistakes of Addington's government at the beginning of the war was chiefly responsible.[1] It was not till Castlereagh in 1807 became Secretary for War that the chaos was reduced to some sort of order. Men were raised for the army partly by volunteering, partly by compulsion. The quota of the militia to be furnished by every county was fixed by Parliament, and the men were selected by ballot, but till 1808 those unwilling to serve could provide substitutes. More than half the recruits needed to fill the ranks of the regulars were militiamen who volunteered to serve abroad.

In the latter years of the war, when this system was in working order, our trained military forces rose to about half a million men, roughly over 200,000 serving abroad and about 300,000 for home defence.[2] As the

[1] "It is not too much to say," observes Mr. Fortescue, "that to the end of the war our military system never recovered from the mischief wrought by Addington and his Secretary for War, Hobart, during the year 1803."

[2] It was made up as follows: Taking the effective strength in January, 1813, 255,000 regulars, of which 203,000 were British and the remainder foreign and colonial. The regular militia amounted to 71,000, and the local militia, who were enlisted for home service only, to 193,000. The volunteers, who had numbered about 350,000 in Addington's time, had now sunk to about a tenth of that number: they had never been of any military value, and in March, 1813, all the infantry that remained except a very few were disbanded. Only the cavalry—or yeomanry as they were now called—were

population of the British Isles was at that time about a third of what it is now, these 500,000 men represented a military effort equivalent to that required to raise a million and a half men nowadays.[1] It is clear that our effort then was less than it is now. We did not need seven hundred thousand women to work our munition factories: hands to hold the plough were not lacking: our universities were not emptied of their undergraduates: we had not then to mourn the flower of a whole generation of our young men.

At that time the demand for money was more widely felt than the demand for men. Pitt in a speech made on the declaration of war had pointed out that there were two ways in which the enemy hoped to subdue Great Britain. One was "to break the spirit, and shake the determination of the country by constantly harassing us with the perpetual apprehension of descent upon our coasts." The other was to "impair our resources and undermine our credit, by the effects of an expensive and protracted contest." The first method had failed, the second remained to be tried.[2]

It is not easy to compare the financial burdens imposed by the war with Napoleon with those imposed on us now. For it is not only a question of the amount of money raised at one period or the other, but of the

retained. Probably 30,000 would be an adequate estimate of the volunteers and yeomanry. Add all these different figures together and it is clear that we had about half a million Englishmen in arms, in addition to fifty or sixty thousand foreigners.

[1] Fortescue, County Lieutenancies, 250, 260, 269, 283. A summary of the military organisation since 1803 is contained in pp. 283-6.

[2] Mahan, Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire, ii. 100.

capacity of the country to bear the burden at the two dates. What was the comparative wealth of the country then and now, and the purchasing power of money at the one date and the other? These factors in the problem cannot be exactly estimated. However, making every allowance for the difference in population, it is clear that the country is very much richer in accumulated wealth now than it was then. Figures do not furnish a fully satisfactory standard of comparison, but they at least enable us to trace the growth of the national burdens during a particular period.

Take first the increase of the National Debt. In 1792, when the first war began, it amounted to 237 millions, and the interest on it annually was about 9½ millions. At the peace of Amiens in 1802 the Debt was 637 millions and the annual charge just under 20 millions. In 1815 the Debt was 885 millions and the annual charge about 32½ millions. Thus the National Debt and the annual interest on it were about three and a half times as much at the end of these two wars as they were at the beginning.

There was a little larger increase in the amount of the revenue raised by taxation. Speaking roughly, it was about 17 millions in 1793, 35 millions in 1802, and over 68 millions in 1815 (excluding Ireland), so that it was quadrupled during this period.

To help our imagination, let us take some particular commodities and see how they were affected by the necessary increase in taxation. The tax on sugar was doubled between 1793 and 1815, the tax on tobacco was two and a half times as much as it was at the earlier date. The taxes on wine and spirits were, roughly,

doubled or trebled. The same fate befell what Falstaff calls "the poor creature small beer." The rise in the taxation of beer is more difficult to calculate, because the taxes on malt and hops and the license duties were also raised. The proceeds of the taxes on beer and its ingredients had brought in about 3½ millions a year when the war began; they rose to about 10 millions by its end. No desire to encourage teetotalism stayed the hands of our legislators: the consumption of non-alcoholic drinks was not encouraged. At the beginning of the war the tax on tea was only 12½ per cent. of its value, by the end this had risen to 96 per cent. of its value.

Direct taxation was increased in the same way, though not to the same extent. There were a number of new direct taxes imposed. Licenses for all sorts of things had to be paid for. "A truly free Englishman," said Sydney Smith, "walks about covered with licenses." Some of these new war taxes are still with us to-day. In 1796 Pitt invented the dog license. It began moderately at 5s. for a sporting dog and 3s. for a common dog; it rose finally to 14s. for the one and 8s. for the other, but greyhounds, the aristocrats of their kind, were taxed at a pound a head.

Next year he invented the taxes on succession to property, familiarly known as the Death Duties, and in 1798 he imposed the Income Tax or, as it was then called, the Property Tax. Incomes below £60 were exempted; from £60 to £200 there was a sliding scale; on all incomes above £200 a year the tax was 10 per cent., that is two shillings in the pound. Addington repealed the tax at the peace of Amiens, put it on again at half the rate in 1803, and Lord Henry Petty raised it to the old

rate again in 1806. Landlords complained that it pressed with special severity on the landed interest, which was the mainstay of the nation. "However," added one of them, "if we can keep out the French we need not grumble at any tax," and that was the general spirit. But the complexity of the tax was objected to, even by the most willing. I have a picture called "John Bull at his Studies," it represents him reading a document some yards long, headed "A plain, short, easy description of the different clauses in the Income Tax, so as to render it familiar to the meanest capacity."

One thing is clear: the Income Tax in those days was less than half the rate that it is now, and the same thing is true of direct taxation in general. But the great difference between the war taxation of that period and of to-day is this: at present more than three-quarters of the revenue we are raising is derived from direct taxation. During the war with Napoleon, on the other hand, taxes on consumption furnished most of the money: in 1815, for instance, they brought in about 40 millions, while the direct taxes brought in only 25½ millions.[1]

How was it that Great Britain was able to bear these burdens of taxation and debt, and so to bear them that her credit was not seriously impaired thereby?

The reason was the steady development of her manufactures and her trade during the war, and in spite of the war; we were making money all the time. Between 1792 and 1815 our commerce doubled: imports rose from 20 to 31 millions a year, exports from 18 to 41 millions.

[1] Dowell, History of Taxation, ii. 247.

Some branches of our manufactures grew enormously: for instance, our cotton manufactures; the quantity of cotton employed in our manufacture tripled between 1790 and 1815; the value of the cotton goods exported was about quadrupled.

Our iron trade more than doubled during the Napoleonic war; other branches of manufactures also increased, though not to so great an extent. As remarkable was the development of our sea-borne commerce. Owing to the conquest of the French and Dutch colonies we acquired almost a monopoly of the trade in colonial and tropical products, which we purchased by the sale of our manufactures. By the resale of these products to the continent we obtained the specie required for the payment of our armies and the armies of our allies. Our shipping increased by about 20 per cent. during the war, but this was not sufficient for our needs. In order to secure the distribution of our manufactured goods and to extend the trade of our colonies the government relaxed some of the stipulations of the Navigation Act, and thus supplemented our merchant fleet by the employment of neutral shipping. England became the storehouse and centre of the world's commerce, and the toll we levied upon it swelled the profits of our merchants and the revenue of our government.

This wealth enabled us to subsidise our continental allies, to whom we paid during the ten years that preceded 1814 an average sum of about three millions a year, in addition to supplies of arms, clothing, and other stores.[1]

[1] See Porter, Progress of the Nation, ed. 1847, 517-8.

In order to destroy the commerce which was the main source of our financial strength, Napoleon devised what was termed the Continental Blockade. This scheme, initiated by the Berlin Decree in November, 1806, was systematically put into execution after the treaties of Tilsit had placed the continent under Napoleon's control. It was not like the U Boat Blockade of the present, an attempt to cut off the food supply of Great Britain. That was not possible. Great Britain then was far more self-sufficing than it is now. We imported no foreign meat; and very little corn. In ordinary years we imported only about one twentieth of the wheat we needed for our consumption, that is less than three weeks supply. In the bad years, when our harvest was deficient, our home supply was reduced by one third, and we needed foreign corn to the extent of twenty weeks supply. Now, even in good years, we depend for forty weeks of the year on foreign corn. Our position therefore was infinitely stronger then than it is now.[1]

Hence Napoleon's Continental Blockade was not designed to cut off our food supply. It was designed to close our markets; to prevent us selling the manufactures we made and the colonial products we imported to the European nations, so that we might be unable to get the money needed to carry on the war. After the treaties of Tilsit he was able to put this scheme systematically into practice.

We met the blockade by finding new markets. In 1805, 1806, and 1807 the United States took nearly

[1] Rose, Napoleonic Studies, ed. 1906. Britain's Food Supply in the Napoleonic War, pp. 213-4.

one third of our exports.[1] At the end of 1807 Napoleon's attack on Portugal began. The result was that first Brazil and the Portuguese colonies were thrown open to our trade. A letter written in December, 1807, describes Brazil as "the real El Dorado" for British merchants.[2] In 1808 Napoleon attacked Spain, and the Spanish colonies were open to us. The result was that our exports to America (exclusive of the United States) rose from 7¾ millions in 1805, to 10 millions in 1806 and 1807, to 18 millions in 1809.

At the same time the old markets were not absolutely closed to us. Every kind of evasion was practised. Heligoland, captured in 1807, became a great depot of English goods, which were smuggled thence into North Germany.[3] Malta was a similar depot for the Mediterranean countries. Our trade was never absolutely excluded from Russia. When English ships were not allowed to enter Russian ports, our merchandise found its way thither in neutral ships. In order to prevent this contraband trade, Napoleon was forced to annex Holland and the coast districts of northern Germany, and to make his customs regulations even more stringent and more burdensome. At one time, too, he found these restrictions so burdensome that he set them aside by granting licenses which permitted neutral ships to land cargoes in British ports; at another time, while still excluding British manufactures, he admitted colonial products.

We suffered considerably: the recent application of

[1] Porter, Progress of the Nation, 361, 386; cf. Halévy, Histoire du Peuple Anglais au XIX^e siècle, 297; Mahan, ii. 331.

[2] Buckingham, Court and Cabinets, iv. 221.

[3] Fisher, Napoleonic Statesmanship, p. 338.

steam to machinery and the new mechanical inventions of the time had led to the production of more manufactured goods than the home market needed, and foreign markets were indispensable. Manufacturers saw goods they could not sell heaped up in their warehouses, and were threatened with ruin. That was the case in 1811 and 1812. There is an admirable account of the situation in Charlotte Bronte's "Shirley": many other manufacturers, like Robert Moore, were threatened on the one hand by bankruptcy and on the other by riots against their new machinery.

Still greater was the suffering of the artisans thrown out of work by the new machinery, and driven to desperation by the rise in the price of bread. Hence, at certain times amongst certain classes, there was a cry for peace on any terms. "National honour," writes Charlotte Bronte, "was become a mere empty name, of no value in the eyes of many, because their sight was dim with famine, and for a morsel of meat they would have sold their birthright." [1] The sufferings of the working-classes during the worst years of that war were far greater than anything they have to endure now. There were no munition factories to provide work for the unemployed, no labour battalions, in short, there was no mobilisation of labour for war purposes to counteract the effect of unemployment in certain trades.

While British trade suffered greatly, the trade of the continent suffered too. Our blockading ships prevented the importation of cotton and dyes and ruined the manufactures of France and Germany: our cruisers stopped their export trade, and the two causes combined to raise

[1] "Shirley," ed. 1857, p. 22.

the cost of living throughout the continent.[1] It became a question of endurance ; could Europe forego external produce for a longer time than Great Britain could do without the European market? A caricature, based on a saying of Wyndham, represented Great Britain and France as two competitors, each with a tub of water before him, trying who could hold his head under water longest without suffocation.[2]

For us the worst period was 1810, 1811, and 1812. By that time the South American market was glutted with our goods, and in 1812 war closed the markets of the United States. In two out of the three years corn rose to double its ordinary price owing to the coincidence of bad harvests with shortage in our foreign supplies. But at that very moment the tide turned: the situation on the continent improved. Since the treaty of Tilsit in 1807 Englishmen had passed through five years of alternate hope and depression. We began by capturing the Danish fleet (in September, 1807) in order to prevent Napoleon from employing it against us: a stroke which some historians severely condemn and others justify:[3] at the moment it was hailed with exultation as a master stroke of policy. Next, in 1808, Wellesley drove the French out of Portugal by his victories at Rolica and Vimeiro. Hope rose high in England. After so many military failures—York's unsuccessful campaigns in Flanders and Holland, after

[1] The sufferings of German trade and manufactures are set forth in Mr. Fisher's Napoleonic Statesmanship, pp. 208, 320, 342.

[2] Mahan, Sea Power, ii. 280.

[3] Mahan, ii. 277 ; Fyffe, 237 ; Fortescue, vi. 59-78 ; Egerton, British Foreign Policy in Europe, 127 ; Rose, Napoleonic Studies, 133-65.

deadly expeditions to the West Indies, futile attempts to land an army in North Germany, and useless expeditions to South America, the nation at last had a general it could trust, and an army that could and did beat the enemy. "We shall no more be told, I hope," wrote a lady, "that whatever we may do by sea, our land troops are inferior to every other nation: that we are always worsted, and that it is ridiculous for us to attempt to cope with the French. This is the language I have continually heard, even very lately." [1]

Some people concluded that the whole struggle in Spain was over. Then came the news that by the Convention of Cintra Junot and his army had been allowed to evacuate Portugal, instead of being forced to surrender as prisoners of war, and exaggerated depression succeeded exaggerated hope. Newspapers appeared with black edges, and there was an universal outcry against the generals and the ministry. "The ministers when they speak in confidence speak of the English war in Spain as over," said Thomas Grenville.[2] Moore's retreat heightened the general gloom. What he had achieved by his advance was not realised; over his "cold ashes" they upbraided the victor of Corunna, and faith in British generals and British statesmen fell to zero. How could they contend with Napoleon? "Alas," wrote Walter Scott, "we want everything but courage and virtue in this desperate contest. Skill, knowledge of mankind, ineffable, unhesitating villany, combination of movements and combination of means are with the adversary. We can only fight like mastiffs,

[1] Granville, Private Correspondence, ii. 327.

[2] Buckingham, Court and Cabinets of George III. iv. 283.

boldly, blindly and faithfully." [1] Wordsworth "in the worst moments of those evil days" never lost faith, but his hopes for the emancipation of Europe rested rather on moral influence than material force. His tract on the Convention of Cintra was an exposition of "those principles by which alone the independence of nations can be preserved or recovered." [2]

The rest of the year 1809 was not more encouraging. Austria took up arms again in April, won a battle at Aspern in May, and was beaten at Wagram at the beginning of July. In August our expedition to Walcheren ended in disaster, and the finest army we had yet raised was decimated by disease. Wellington's victory at Talavera on the 28th of July was followed by his retreat to Portugal, and was denounced as a rash and barren battle, for which he deserved a trial rather than a peerage. The utmost that many people hoped for was the safe return of the forces in Portugal. It was the great merit of the government that it declined to be influenced by public opinion, and left the decision about the expediency of continuing operations in Spain to the general it had chosen. "It is quite certain," said Wellington to Lord Stanhope, "that my opinion alone was the cause of the continuance of the war in the Peninsula." While he was confident he could maintain himself in Portugal, he told the ministers that he could retire and embark his army when he pleased. To stand on the defensive was the best way to economise his men and to

[1] Lockhart, Life of Scott, ii. 68, ed. 1900.

[2] Wordsworth's Tract on the Convention of Cintra, ed. by A. V. Dicey, 1915. Reproduction of the original title-page, p. 1.

effect his object. "I am under no apprehension of the result of an action," said he, "for I'll take care not to fight one, unless I can choose the ground for it."[1] This was what he called the "sure game," and he played it through 1810 and 1811. By the close of 1811 his success had inspired the nation with fresh confidence. One section of the Opposition still continued to minimise Wellington's victories, to predict disasters and to demand his recall. Another section of the Opposition urged the vigorous prosecution of the war. "They have nine-tenths of the people at their back who are eager for maintaining the contest," confessed an opponent of the government.[2] There was a difference in the temper of the army too; in 1810 Wellington had complained of the "system of croaking" which existed amongst some of his officers. "All the croakers are in England," wrote a young officer to his mother, when the campaign of 1812 began.[3] At last Wellington was able to change the sure game for the bold game, and he played it with equal skill. It was the right moment for a change of strategy. The emperor Alexander, unable to bear the yoke of the continental blockade any longer, had broken with Napoleon, already the Grand Army was being organised for its Russian campaign, and veteran soldiers were being withdrawn from Spain to stiffen its ranks.

Wellington began by storming the two fortresses which guarded the road from Portugal into Spain, and

[1] Maxwell, Life of Wellington, i. 154, 193, 205; Buckingham, Court and Cabinets, iv. 474.

[2] Dudley, Letters to Ivy, p. 145.

[3] Granville, Private Correspondence, ii. 433.

won the battle of Salamanca in July, 1812. The news of it came to cheer the Russians as they were making their last stand before Moscow, and encouraged Alexander to remain firm after Moscow was taken. Then came in sudden succession the retreat from Moscow, the destruction of the Grand Army, the revolt of Prussia against Napoleon, and the beginning of the national movement in Germany. It seemed as if the age of miracles had begun again. "I had no hope in my time," wrote Walter Scott, "of seeing the dry bones of the continent so warm with life again, as this revivification of the Russians proves them to be." And in another letter, "I could as soon have believed in the resurrection of the Romans as in that of the Prussians —yet it seems a real and active renovation of national spirit." [1] For a moment in the summer of 1813 the genius of Napoleon and the courage of his young conscripts stayed the tide of defeat: all turned on the question whether Austria would throw fresh forces into the balance to assist the battered armies of Russia and Prussia. Just at that critical moment Wellington, bursting again into Spain, gained the battle of Vittoria (21st June), drove the French back to the Pyrenees, and helped to put an end to the hesitation of the Emperor Francis. That November, after Napoleon's army had been defeated at Leipsic and driven back across the Rhine, and Wellington's outposts had passed the frontier of France, the exultation in England knew no bounds. "Domestic politics," wrote Campbell, "have ceased to exist. There are no longer any parties in the country. People have no great regard for the present ministry,

[1] Lockhart, Life of Scott, ii. 250, 308.

but a change is neither desired nor thought of. The Opposition is wholly discomfited and dissolved. . . . The struggle with Bonaparte engrosses the national attention. The independence of England and of Europe seems now established for this and probably for many generations." [1]

During the winter there were peace negotiations at Frankfort: in the spring, while Napoleon was making a splendid struggle against overpowering odds, there were six weeks of negotiations at Chatillon. In England the possibility of their ending in peace was feared rather than hoped. A diarist notes in his journal: "General apprehensions of preliminaries of peace having been signed at Chatillon; an almost universal dread of any pretended peace with Bonaparte." [2] Events moved with a torrent's swiftness after the congress ended. A fortnight later Paris fell; a week after that Napoleon abdicated. In the popular rejoicing there was no sign of pity for fallen greatness. The struggle had been too long, too bitter, too uncertain. English caricatures pictured Napoleon in a cage, escorted by Cossacks or run down by a pack of hounds. To the more reflective it seemed that the most dramatic career in history had ended with an anti-climax. To Byron, for instance:

> "The desolator desolate,
> The victor overthrown,
> The arbiter of other's fate
> A suppliant for his own."

seemed to lack dignity and resolution. Some said the tyrant ought to have committed suicide as Nero and

[1] Life of Lord Campbell, i. 299. [2] Lord Colchester's Diary, ii. 477.

Otho did. An ex-First Lord of the Admiralty quoted Isaiah, and not inappropriately either. "Can this be the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms, that made the world as a wilderness and destroyed the cities thereof, that opened not the house of his prisoners?"[1]

Others in that hour remembered Napoleon's great antagonist. "This hath God done," wrote Wilberforce; "how can I but wish that my poor old friend Pitt were still alive to witness this catastrophe of the twenty-five years drama."[2] They were right who remembered Pitt. He was not a great war minister—in his domestic policy there were errors too—but he had been the soul of the nation in the struggle: calm in every crisis, facing adverse fortune with indomitable cheerfulness and adhering to his purpose with unwearying tenacity. But the people he represented and inspired deserved some credit too. Mr. Roosevelt lately compared the England of that day with the England of this. "England," says he, "has in this war reached a height of achievement loftier than that which she attained in the struggle with Napoleon, and she has reached that height in a far shorter time."[3]

It may be true. We have raised more men; we have certainly raised more money: an economist[4] tells me that we shall probably have spent in the four years of war as large a proportion of our means as our ancestors

[1] Lord Colchester's Diary, ii. 484.

[2] Life of W. Wilberforce, iv. 171.

[3] Preface to "England's Effort," by Mrs. Humphry Ward.

[4] Mr. Edwin Cannan. The next one I met disputed his calculations.

did in the twenty-one years between 1793 and 1815. But there is one point in which we have not surpassed their effort or equalled their performance. They were tried by fiercer extremes of good and evil fortune than we have known, the burdens and perils we have borne for three years they endured for seven times as many, and did not lay down their arms till they had attained the ends they fought for. Here it will be enough for us to equal them.

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